

**MULTICAST DISTRIBUTION OF PRESENCE INFORMATION
FOR AN INSTANT MESSAGING SYSTEM**

ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a system, method and-network (110) for multicast distribution of presence information to a plurality of communication devices (102, 104, 106, 108). A contact list (122, 124, 126, 128), associated with each communication device, identifies one or more of the other communication devices. The network provides one or more multicast addresses based on the contact lists of the communication devices to the plurality of communication devices. The network also sends multicast messages identified by the one or more multicast addresses to the plurality of communication devices. Each multicast address identifies a group of multicast devices among the plurality of communication devices, and the multicast messages include presence information about the group of multicast devices. A portion of the plurality of communication devices receives the multicast messages identified by the one or more multicast addresses and extracts the presence information about the group of multicast devices from the multicast messages.